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17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 280 WORDS) The author, Director of the Advanced Placement Program, College Entrance Examination Board, defended the Board against charges that the program is an "undemocratic money-making scheme." The Advanced Placement Program is maintained at a loss by the CEEB. While American education seeks to educate all students to the best of their ability, specific programs must be confined to specific areas and abilities and in no way hinder the overall objective. It can justifiably be criticised by the fact that it is used by schools and colleges to <u>look</u> rather than be good. Worthy programs are always exploited by those who wish to receive credit without earning it. By overemphasizing testmanship, it may fail to encourage true knowledge. Evaluation is always necessary but must never be made an end in itself. The program "limits the growth of the curriculum, unduly influences it, and restricts experimentation." This criticism is often temporarily valid because resources normally used for experimentation are diverted to implementation, but should not remain permanently so diverted. "Identification of the superior student is difficult at best; early identification is dangerous." As long as identification is regarded as approximate at best and is constantly reevaluated, the danger becomes minimal, certainly less than the danger of refusing to identify at all for fear of making a mistake.							
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What's Wrong with the Advanced Placement Program

JACK N. ARBOLINO

ONE of the best rules of conduct I know is "no sudden moves." It is one of the by-laws of a group of seven-year-old girls. These small irregulars list another catchy principle: "If running, do not chase." But that one has no bearing here and, I must admit I cite the first only to break it.

My sudden move is to tell what's wrong with the Advanced Placement Program. If you haven't heard what's *right* with it, you haven't been listening very hard. Such diverse educational spokesmen as Bowles,

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Conant, and Rickover have praised it. The NASSP and the NCIS have devoted special publications to it and, perhaps most important of all, school and college teachers and administrators all over the country have not only endorsed it and become volunteer workers for the cause, but they have manifestly appropriated to themselves a private sense of responsibility for its welfare. I know no higher praise than that.

Since its inception, the program has been singled out and sung to, and part of my job for the past two years has been to do some of this singing—usually, I should add, as a small voice in a strong chorus. Maledictions have been few, for, if the Program is not just a cut below baseball, mother, and the U.S. Marines, it is at least to be counted among the first ten American blessings.

Is it really worth such high marks? Is it, as the President of Brown described it, "the most promising thing that has happened in American education in years"? If it is, it can stand a harshly critical look. Here are the charges against it:

- A. It is undemocratic, a money-making scheme of the College Board, a subversive attempt by the colleges to re-establish dictatorial practices.
- B. It is used by schools and colleges to *look* rather than to *be* good.
- C. It accents credit and, by overemphasizing testmanship, may lead to the breeding of a race of academic spigots.
- D. It limits the growth of the curriculum, unduly influences it, and restricts experimentation.
- E. Identification of the superior student is difficult at best; early identification is dangerous.

Tristram Shandy's father lumped unimportant household tasks with serious conjugal duties for regular execution to avoid being pestered and plagued throughout the month. His creator called all such duties "concernments." If one grants that all the charges above are, though different, concernments of the Advanced Placement Program, I too may be forgiven for trying to deal with all of them—the few false and unimportant and the remainder valid and serious—at one time. Those listed under B, C, D, and E have validity; those in A have none and the latter will do for a start.

Advanced placement is, in a sense, a program for the elite, but it is hardly undemocratic. There is varied and abundant testimony that the establishment of Advanced Placement courses in a school raises the standards throughout that school, and by radiating out and down Advanced Placement benefits all classes. The President's Science Advisory Committee has stated that: "In a democracy we should provide each individual with the opportunity to develop his own talents to the fullest. It would be difficult to think of anything less democratic than a system that sacrifices in any way the stimulation of the bright student, either to learn more or progress faster through the prescribed work." Perhaps the most succinct expression of this point of view is: "There is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals."

The matter of making money is easily put to rest. The Program lost \$150,000 last year; it will lose about \$200,000 this year. The College Board supports it proudly and well, with the hope that through increases in candidate volume and continued economies and improvements we may reach a break-even point in the future.

To complete the easily answered, the false concernments, it should be made clear that it is really the schools that are running the show. Schools do the work and the colleges benefit. It is true that certain colleges have shown leadership, but this has consisted largely in their accepting one basic premise of the Program: college work completed in school deserves college credit. In large measure the colleges have been the reluctant partners. Rather than dictating, they have served. I still receive letters from colleges which say, in effect: "We have seen your recent list of participating colleges. Last month our Committee on Instruction met and decided to take part in the Advanced Placement Program. Will you please be sure to list us the next time you print? We want to be members. What is it?"

With B the valid charges begin. If a comprehensive school is judged *only* by the number of candidates it prepares for Advanced Placement examinations, if other students and other courses are neglected, if, in short, in the quest for reputation a school pursues knowledge by description rather than by acquaintance, performance will be sacrificed to appearance. It is true that the Program provides a way to look good as well as a way to be good, but it is better to be bald than to wear a curly wig, or, to quote Mark Van Doren and Henry Bragdon, "The thing itself, not the appearance of it, is all that is ultimately important." I once saw a great football coach working with his ends. The lesson seemed to be that an aspiring pass-catcher, one who is trying to look good, will run with arms extended (to show he is trying) for a ball that is out of reach, but a real receiver will run with arms pumping (to get more speed) and fling them out at the last instant. He too may miss, but because he is not concerned with trying to *look* good he will be closer. The college that jumps on the bandwagon of Advanced Placement without truly participating and understanding it is serving neither itself nor the Program. The school that offers Advanced Placement courses and then, to rack up scores, dissuades from taking the examinations those students of whom it is not sure, subverts the ideal. One argument, then, that can be made is that, because it brings prestige, the Program lends itself to exploitation by those who seek reputation.

The concernments of C—credit, testmanship, and spigots—are serious. I know no way to eliminate the bugaboo of credit. Academic bookkeeping is an integral part of American education. While this system lasts the Program must conform. Study is its own reward, but we must deal in common currency.

To guard against spigotry, the examining committees take great pains. Course descriptions are general, and each year the examinations are

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changed. Nevertheless, the examination grade is the most important factor in the eyes of the colleges. Again, as in the case of credit, the Program falls heir to the ills as well as to the attributes of our national system. As great events are sometimes made smaller by art, as the beauty of a face is diminished by minute inspection of each feature, so is a worthy endeavor made ignoble by counting. But in our over-all educational system, we count. We pay off on grades, and so does the Advanced Placement Program.

The matter of D seems to me the most serious problem the Program engenders. The traditional subjects in which Advanced Placement operates are varied and balanced. Nevertheless, as the Program grows there may be a tendency for participating schools to hew too closely to the line. In addition, the substantial experimentation that is going on in physics, mathematics, English, and other subjects may be inhibited by the existence of the Program. Because of the prestige the Program brings, it is unlikely that a successfully participating school would be eager to embark on new courses or new ways of teaching old courses. The Advanced Placement Committee is aware of the influence that the Program may exert and it is fearful lest, worthy and important as it is, the Program fix curriculum. To this end the book, *Advanced Placement Program: Course Descriptions*, carries the following paragraphs:

Advanced placement is just one of the ways American secondary schools have chosen to deal with the education of the gifted and the better-than-average student. Under the general rubric of honors work in America there is much diversity. One important quality of the Program is that, although it is still relatively new and still relatively small, it is workable as a common device and it is national in scope. It may be that out of the diversity of honors courses and through the use of the Program, there will come a concentrated, workable plan to better educate our best students.

Advanced placement is not limited to those areas in which the College Board offers examinations. Greek, philosophy, and Far Eastern history—among other subjects at college level—have been offered by a small number of schools and recognized by certain colleges. This development should serve to indicate that the Program is not designed to remain static.

The last serious charge, E, concerns selection. We must never close doors on our young people. We must select, we must try to identify the superior student early, but we must always be ready to say we were wrong. Gumption Quotient is at least as important as Intelligence Quotient. A program like Advanced Placement is greatly dependent for success on the calibre of the guidance counselor. He must sift, study, and constantly assess his over- and under-achievers, his late bloomers and early faders, the rebels, the flashes, the strong, the quiet, and the main-chance hustlers. The appalling isolation of the elite which is too frequently a hallmark of European education must not be allowed to occur in the American high school. On the other hand, pedagogical sentimentality must not dissuade us from trying to identify our best students. Guid-

ance must be continuous and selective labels, like "slow" and "superior," should never become fixed.

It seems to me that the charges discussed above constitute the bulk of the criticism that has been directed at the Program. It is still worth high marks and, if it is not the most promising thing that has happened in American education in years, it is at least exciting and important. It continues to encourage schools and colleges to work together, it tends to eliminate waste of time and duplication of studies, and perhaps, most important, it stimulates students and teachers to higher achievement. Paul Roundy of Western Reserve Academy says, "We have only our joys to celebrate." This may be too generous—there are problems. Nevertheless, the Advanced Placement Program provides a way to strengthen American education, and it is working.